

# Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

## Catechesis: Applying the catechetical process

### ***Catechesis: 1 hour***



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

## **Theme**

Catechists should learn to apply good catechetical methodology to the lessons being taught.

## **Catechist Competencies**

1. Understand the catechetical process in practical terms that can influence lesson planning.
2. Make good choices of what learning activities can best help students with the different phases of a good lesson.
3. Develop a dialogue with the authors of a text series through proper use of the catechist guide.

## **Documentary References —**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #4-10; General Directory for Catechesis #139-159, 181-185.*

## **Some preliminaries**

A catechist needs to work through a lesson in the framework of one's own life before trying to apply that lesson to the students. Most catechist guides give suggestions for doing this. Do not skip those pages at the start of each lesson in your manual.

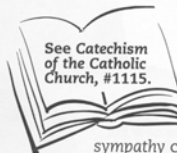
The printed book we give the students is not the focus of the lessons. The central focus is the catechetical process.

The catechist guide maps out the process for us. This book is not just supplemental suggestions. It is a way the program

*Catechists who are working with this lesson for credit toward certification should write answers to the questions in italics and submit them to their catechetical leader upon completion.*

## **Catechism in Context**

**Doctrinal Foundation** This chapter explains that we share in the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection through the sacraments of the Church. Through the Sacraments of Initiation, the Sacraments of Healing, and the Sacraments of Service—always celebrated in the context of the word—we grow in the Christian life of grace. We respond to the grace of the sacraments with works of mercy, acts of compassion and charity that we do for our neighbors. Compassion (from two Latin words meaning "to suffer with"; the word sympathy comes from the Greek equivalent) is not pity, which is condescending. Pity looks down on the one suffering; compassion and sympathy stand side by side with the sufferer. True Christian charity is not motivated by pity but by compassion and by our perception of Christ "in the distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa). Through these works of mercy, as well as through the sacraments, we participate in the Paschal mystery of Jesus' dying and rising.



## **One-Minute Retreat for Catechists**

### **Read**

"The first task of the Church is to celebrate with joy the gift of God's saving activity among human beings. This is the Eucharist."

—Gustavo Gutiérrez

### **Reflect**

How does the Eucharist renew my faith each time I celebrate it?

### **Pray**

Dear Jesus, it is easy for me to get wrapped up in the daily events of my life. Help me focus on what is important—my spiritual journey. May I always remember that the sacraments are steps on the road to new life.

authors have of dialoguing with you about the catechetical process. This dialogue can help you discover proper use of the textbook and other catechetical tools.

Find where in your catechist guide the authors of your text series help you understand where they "are coming from" both in general and in the day's lesson you are working with.

Substituting learning activities for the ones suggested in the lesson can be a very good move. For example: A story out of the day's happenings — local or beyond — may be so "on target" that it would be a great one to replace or put next to the canned story at the start of a lesson.

*How do you begin planning the work of a day's lesson?*

*Describe the catechetical process as presented by the authors of the text series you are using.*

*If you substitute a learning activity for one suggested in the guide, are you doing so with the process of that lesson in mind?*

## **Starting the lesson — gathering**

The catechetical process is academic...and then some. A key to successful catechesis combines relying on the ease with which students are able to work within the academic setting while conveying the sense that religion class is a unique experience.

Catechists need to help the students make the transition into the religious education experience.

## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

For your students, that transition is aided by the environment they encounter when entering the room. Even though a catechist may be inviting students into a room set up similar to their regular school experience, there may be some things a catechist can do that say this class session will be special.

For students who attend the parish school, their catechists need to do what it takes to help the students shift from their being in the room they are in for other lessons of the day to readiness for catechesis.

The transition can be accomplished in many ways: perhaps, with music; maybe with an object, symbol, or quote that represents the day's topic or theme; maybe with the placement of the room's prayer table into its spot for the lesson. It might be something tailored to the style of the catechist. The artful catechist can determine the right approach in this regard.

The "gathering" can introduce the topic for the day in some preliminary ways. Manuals give suggestions for this introductory process.

*What might you do to help prepare your students to be receptive to the day's lesson?*

*How is your role as catechist different from other kinds of teaching roles your students encounter?*

*What can you be doing at the start of a session to bring about personal attention to the theme of the lesson?*

## Storytelling

Our students need to reflect on the experiences of their own lives, put them up against the Gospel narrative, and see where they are in relation to the theme of the day's lesson.

A story is told — based on human experience. The catechist is in the role of *storyteller*. Good suggestions for presenting the story are in the teacher's manual. The story in the text should not be turned into an oral reading exercise. Students receive it best by *listening*, not following the story line-by-line on the page. A student should not be asked to read the story out loud. The text of the story is printed as a backup, for later reference.

A well-presented story will evoke experiences out of the student's memory. Time given for this imaginative process is worth it, even if it is a period of silence.

Students will be able to share out of the fabric of their own life experiences. Reflective activities can deepen their awareness of the spiritual meaning built into the storytelling. Discussion is not the only kind of reflective activity to use. Some students thrive on it; others find verbal sharing difficult. There are different learning styles. A variety of activities should allow even the reticent to do this reflection.

Scriptures, bible stories, stories of the saints, or those of notable persons may help the Christian narrative to intersect with the students' own stories. Use creative methodology for working with these elements.



WE ARE INVITED

### 1. Open

**Personal Experience** Tell the students about a time you were sick or in pain and then recovered your health. Invite a few volunteers to share similar experiences.

**Prayer** Remind the students that God is always with us, even when we are suffering or dying. Then pray together the opening prayer.

### Working with the Pictures

Ask the students to describe the picture. (A sad mother is holding a starving or sick baby.) Explain that this mother may be from Ethiopia or another country that is experiencing famine.

### SCRIPTURE STORY

#### In the Name of Jesus Christ

**Catholics Believe . . .**

that we share in the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through the sacraments.

Catechism, #1115

The man waited outside the Temple gate, the gate called Beautiful, as he had waited every day he could remember. For 40 years he had waited, lying there in the dust where his relatives left him each morning. By his side a clay bowl waited, too, for the jingle of coins.

The waiting man was a beggar born with a body so twisted he could not sit or stand or walk. He could not even raise a hand to shield his eyes from the glare of the late afternoon sun.

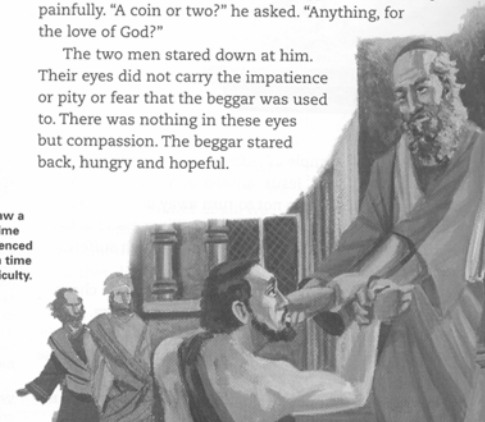
Then shadows fell across his face—two men on their way to the Temple for prayer. The beggar moved his lips painfully. "A coin or two?" he asked. "Anything, for the love of God?"

The two men stared down at him. Their eyes did not carry the impatience or pity or fear that the beggar was used to. There was nothing in these eyes but compassion. The beggar stared back, hungry and hopeful.



### ACTIVITY

Tell a story or draw a picture about a time when you experienced "new life" after a time of waiting or difficulty.



## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

Terms, definitions, doctrinal explanations can help the student to put labels on what the reflective process has surfaced. The teaching portion of the lesson helps the students understand their lives in the light of the Church's teachings and traditions. This should be a culmination of the story and reflection process.

*What do you do to prepare the students to listen to the story?*

*How can you tell the story in a way that it stimulates the evocation of memories?*

*How can you optimize the probability that all can put themselves in the story after listening to it?*

*Do you use a variety of reflective activities?*

*How can you help scripture come alive?*

*How can you help them understand the teachings of the Church that are relevant in this lesson?*

### Application — taking it personally

The catechetical process is primarily about the *here and now* — a way of discovering and articulating the faith dimension of one's present life experience.

Because we affirm the value of the religious experience of students at their own level of development, the catechist helps them to apply the lessons learned to their lives right now.

By doing this we are developing in them the habits they need

for living the virtuous life. Virtues are habits, attitudes, approaches toward living. As our students grow, they will be able to apply these habitual ways of thinking and behaving to the new scenarios they encounter. We want them to "be good at it" by the time they are adults.

Next year they can do the reflection needed to apply faith to what is going on in their lives then. Catechesis is a process that is ongoing, never completed.

The application segment of the lesson is vital. It should not be abbreviated or even skipped over. Allot the proper amount of time.

*Do you take the children seriously as spiritual individuals, on their own age level?*

*What can you do to get to know what is going on in their lives spiritually? How can you capitalize on that knowledge as you catechize?*

*What kind of learning activities work for you and your students in developing the application process?*

*Will you give as much space in your lesson planning for this segment as it needs?*

### Celebration — bringing the lesson to prayer

We conclude the process by bringing everything together in prayer.

The prayer should include the ingredients of good liturgy — symbol, expressive words, movement, sacred space, active participation, music, ritual and spontaneity.

Any opening prayer formula used should not replace the prayer element of the lesson.

Incorporate into this prayer the symbols, objects, projects, stories, persons, and other ingredients of the lesson.

If your text sets this up for you and you like it — fine. However, you and your students may be able to do it better for your own setting.

Prayer should not be something done only if there is time left. If the students can bring the catechetical process to celebration, it helps them bring their lives to parish liturgy. Again, it is developing a habit or practice.

*Can you plan time for this celebration in your own preparation?*

*Do you see ways you can integrate elements from the catechetical process into the prayer?*

*How can you involve the students actively in this prayer?*

**RECALL**  
What name do we give to the mystery of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection? How do we celebrate that mystery today?

**THINK AND SHARE**  
How do you think life would be different if we did not have Jesus' example to follow?

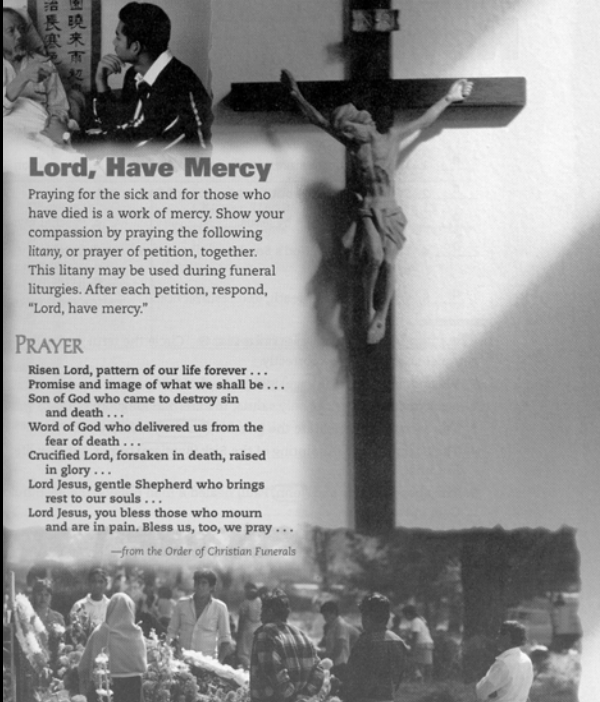
**CONTINUE THE JOURNEY**  
Make a diptych—a two-part picture. On the left, draw an action of Jesus that shows his compassion. On the right, draw a similar action of Jesus' followers today.

**WE LIVE OUR FAITH**

**At Home** Choose one of the Works of Mercy (page 223). Show compassion to a family member in this way.

**In the Parish** As a class or with a partner, volunteer to do chores for a parishioner who is hospitalized or housebound. Remember this person in your prayers, too.

## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert



**Lord, Have Mercy**  
Praying for the sick and for those who have died is a work of mercy. Show your compassion by praying the following litany, or prayer of petition, together. This litany may be used during funeral liturgies. After each petition, respond, "Lord, have mercy."

**PRAYER**  
Risen Lord, pattern of our life forever . . .  
Promise and image of what we shall be . . .  
Son of God who came to destroy sin and death . . .  
Word of God who delivered us from the fear of death . . .  
Crucified Lord, forsaken in death, raised in glory . . .  
Lord Jesus, gentle Shepherd who brings rest to our souls . . .  
Lord Jesus, you bless those who mourn and are in pain. Bless us, too, we pray . . .

—from the Order of Christian Funerals

WE CELEBRATE  
**3. Close**

**Working with the Text**

- To help the students appreciate the Paschal mystery, explain that when someone dies, we are filled with the joyful hope that the person is enjoying new life with God.
- After reading *Lord, Have Mercy* together, remind the students that at Mass we pray for people who are sick and dying.

**Working with the Pictures**

- Call the students attention to the pictures.  
**How are visiting people who are sick and burying the dead each related to the Paschal mystery?** (Both are expressions of our belief in new life and our belief that God is with us in our suffering.)
- Explain to the students that even though the funeral of Christians is not a separate sacrament, it is part of the Church's official liturgy. Besides the vigil (or wake), the rites consist of two main parts, the funeral service (either at Mass or outside Mass) and the committal service (at the graveyard, the mausoleum, or the crematorium).

**Prayer** Bring the chapter to a close with prayer. Have volunteers take turns reading the petitions, and lead the class in responding to them. Invite the students to pray for anyone they know who is sick or who has died.

### Review Questions

1. Can you describe the catechetical process in general?
2. What are objectives to keep in mind as a catechist plans the "Gathering" part of a lesson?
3. What are some things catechists can do to help students to take the teachings in a lesson to heart and apply them to their lives?
4. What are the ingredients necessary for bringing the lesson to prayer?

### The Author

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### Some footnotes

1. Religious education program catechists are expected to complete the catechetical process in one session.
2. School catechists, with shorter religious education time allotments each day, can spread the process over the whole week.
3. Each text series has a way of helping catechists adapt to their own circumstances.
4. Catechists may have to make some decisions about condensing or deselecting some of the year's textbook content. They also need to remember seasonal and program supplements. Your catechetical leader can help you make these choices.
5. A catechist should have confidence in what is being taught in the next years, and in the catechists of those classes as well. No one teacher should be under pressure to "do it all." Dialogue with the other catechists and a review of *Scope and Sequence* documents can aid this awareness. Some catechist guides have *Scope and Sequence* included.

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